DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 149 601 FL 009 167

AUTHOR Dammer, Paul E.
TITLE Revision of the Modern FL Syllabus: Toward a Student-Centered Curriculum in N.Y. State.
INSTITUTION New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers.
PUB DATE Sep 76
NOTE 6p.
JOURNAL CIT Language Association Bulletin; v28 n1 p10-14 Sep 1976

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Career Education; Cultural Education; Curriculum Development; *Curriculum Planning; Educational Diagnosis; Educational Improvement; Educational Needs; Individualized Instruction; Language Enrollment; *Language Instruction; Language Skills; *Modern Language Curriculum; Secondary Education; *Second Language Learning; *State Curriculum Guides; State Departments of Education; Student Centered Curriculum; Student Needs; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *New York

ABSTRACT

The fact that a relatively large segment of the secondary school population chooses to learn a second language, for reasons other than entrance requirements, has implications for foreign language curriculum planners. As part of an initial step in planning new syllabi, the Curriculum Advisory Committee of the New York State Education Department identified the following needs: (1) more options in terms of language goals; (2) greater flexibility in methodology; (3) a cultural component; (4) better evaluation techniques; (5) practical suggestions for handling instructional materials; and (6) more student-centered and individualized instruction. A two-part syllabus is planned; the first part will be a general syllabus applicable to all language teachers and administrators, and the second will be a supplement consisting of solutions to problems in specific languages. The general syllabus will have 7 chapters concerning: (1) philosophy; (2) motivational and promotional techniques; (3) the modern foreign language program; (4) goal-attainment strategies; (5) materials and equipment; (6) extending the classroom; and (7) professional growth. Chapter 3 will be the focal point and will describe the Committee's program, which involves a State Diploma Credit strand and a Local Credit Strand, both of which will allow schools to offer options for concentrating on one, several, or all of the four language skills. Data on foreign language enrollments in New York's public secondary schools in 1974-75 are included. (AM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
NY State Assn. of Foreign Language Teachers
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED149601

FL009167

Language Association **Bulletin**

published by The New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers

Vol. XXVIII | September 1976 | No. 1

REVISION OF THE MODERN FL SYLLABUS: TOWARD A STUDENT-CENTERED CURRICULUM IN N. Y. STATE

Paul E. Dammer, Chief, Bureau of Foreign Languages Education, New York State Education Department

One of the most encouraging aspects of the foreign language scene in the public schools of New York State today is the fact that a relatively large segment of the secondary school population still avails itself of the opportunity to learn languages other than English despite the decrease in the number of post-secondary institutions requiring foreign-language study as a requisite condition for admission (Tables 1 and 2).

Furthermore, it must be noted that foreign language study is not mandated by law or other regulations. Thus, it may be inferred that many students opt to learn languages for reasons other than meeting college entrance or high school graduation requirements. This trend has far-reaching implications for curriculum planners who have a concern for meeting the more diversified learning goals of today's and tomorrow's students.

The call for new State foreign language curriculum guides was in part answered in 1971 by the publication of a new syllabus in Latin, which is based on newly defined linguistic and cultural-aesthetic objectives and which focuses heavily on the development of reading competence, in terms of understanding and appreciation, with minimal reference to English. According to the new syllabus, the development of the linguistic competencies is to be achieved by means of cultural themes, a distinct departure from, for example, the "Caesar-during-the-second-year" approach represented by the earlier syllabus.

In the meantime the need for new syllabi in modern foreign languages has remained acute. As an initial step in planning for the development of new guidelines to replace those developed during the late 1950's and published in the early through mid-1960's, SED, in August, 1974, convened a meeting of a Curriculum Advisory Committee. The Committee, which was composed of outstanding leaders in the field of modern foreign language education in New York State, acknowledged that the old syllabi had had important impact in bringing about many changes in curriculum and methodology at a time when such changes were most critically needed. At the same time, its members identified specific needs which are not sufficiently met by the existing syllabi and to which new guidelines must address themselves. These needs are:

1. More options in terms of course offerings. Such options are needed to recognize the diversified goals of all students who wish to study foreign languages for reasons other than college admission. The standard four-skill sequence should be but one of the options offered.
2. Greater flexibility in methodology in recognition of differing individual preferences for learning and teaching styles.
3. The need to treat culture as an integral part of language learning, making cultural understanding and insights (rather than the memorization of discrete cultural facts) a major objective to be achieved by means of the foreign language that is being learned.
4. Greater attention to the description of various techniques appropriate for evaluating pupils' performance and attitudes in terms of clearly defined objectives.
5. Providing teachers with practical suggestions for adapting instructional materials in order to implement more effectively the courses of study to be recommended in the new syllabi.
6. The inclusion of information concerning recent trends which would facilitate efforts toward making the curriculum and instruction more student-centered, such as individualized instruction and continuous progress, special interest

continued on page 11

Revision of the Modern FL Syllabus: Toward A Student-Centered Curriculum in New York State

(continued from page 1)

topical mini-courses, interdisciplinary courses, career education, use of technology, etc.

The Advisory Committee's recommendations are founded on the philosophical point of view that, given a sufficiently flexible curriculum, all students may derive benefit from foreign language study for reasons other than college admission, a trend already demonstrated in many schools of New York State and supported by the enrollment data shown above. Among the potential benefits cited by the Committee were the following:

- Knowledge of languages other than one's own is an indispensable tool for individuals to learn to know themselves, other human beings, and the world in which they live.
- For this reason, learning about cultures other than one's own is one of the most broadening experiences known to human beings.
- In addition to the long-range benefits to be derived from such experiences, pupils will also realize immediate practical benefits, such as being able to engage in comprehensible conversations in other languages on topics within their interests and abilities, or to comprehend short-wave broadcasts (thereby bringing them closer to the world and realities around them), or to read parts of a newspaper in another language, or to participate in correspondence with pen pals in other countries, or to feel a sense of accomplishment and pride which comes from the ability to be of help to those fellow human beings residing in our cities, towns, and villages who know no English.
- Lastly, a survey of the classified sections of major daily newspapers has revealed that there is an ever-increasing demand in a wide range of careers for individuals who, in addition to other marketable skills, have competence in at least one language other than English.

In making these recommendations, the Committee concluded that the opportunity for learning other languages to meet these needs must be provided chiefly by the schools. This is particularly true when such opportunity is not readily available either in pupils' homes and communities or through travel or residence abroad.

Diversified Methods Essential

Thus, the Curriculum Advisory Committee has charged SED with a significant task: to provide a curriculum for modern foreign languages which is to serve a much broader range of the school population than ever before. Such curriculum must take into account, and compensate for, individual differences in students' attitudes, interests, needs, abilities, and learning styles. Neither a single course of study nor a single method of teaching nor mode of learning will suffice to meet the wider range of needs.

Format of the New Syllabus

In addition to serving the needs of students and teachers, the new guidelines must provide information for school administrators, guidance staff, and teacher trainers. It has been determined that the most economical, appropriate, and useful format for this purpose will be a two-part syllabus: first, a general syllabus applicable to all modern foreign languages, designed to reach the attention of teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and teacher trainers; second, a supplement to the general syllabus, consisting of solutions to special problems in specific languages, including sample lessons and bibliographies. Work on the draft of the general syllabus has begun. Work on the special language sections of the supplemental part will follow at a later stage.

The General Syllabus

The general syllabus, as planned, will contain seven chapters:

I. Philosophy
II. Motivational and Promotional Techniques
III. The Modern Foreign Language Program
IV. Goal-Attainment Strategies
V. Materials and Equipment
VI. Extending the Classroom
VII. Professional Growth

Chapter III, "The Modern Foreign Language Program," will constitute its major focal point, encompassing the Advisory Committee's recommendation for a more diversified curriculum. The program will be described in terms of two strands: a State Diploma (or "Regents") Credit strand and a Local Credit strand, both preceded by Basic Courses in each of the languages offered in a particular school. Within each of the two strands it will be possible for schools to offer to students options for concentrating on the development of one, several, or all of the four language skills.

Each of the suggested optional sequences will be described on the basis of significant cultural themes and in terms of expected outcomes rather than length of study.

As an additional departure from the older syllabi, the new guidelines will also contain recommended course options for students who have completed one of the State Diploma Credit sequence options. These courses will be designed to encourage those students to continue foreign language study beyond the point at which they take the appropriate Regents examination so that they may further develop their language skills to a level of competence required by an increasing number of careers.

The Basic Courses

Every student would be expected to acquire a basic foundation in all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) of the language(s) he/she chooses to learn regardless of the options he wishes to pursue. The development of that level of competence will be one of the functions of the Basic Courses in each of the languages.

A second important function to be served by the Basic Courses will be the identification of individual students' relative strengths and weaknesses in each of the four skill areas through carefully designed evaluation procedures. This diagnostic component of the Basic Courses will enable teachers and guidance counselors to help students identify the options most suitable to their abilities and interests. Because of this diagnostic feature, the Basic Courses will contain a zero-reject provision, by recommending that students be credited for their accomplishments in specific skill areas without penalty for lack of commensurate achievement in other skill areas for which they lack aptitude or interest and which they would not pursue further.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the Basic Courses would ideally be part of the language program below grade 9. In school districts which do not offer foreign language instruction below grade 9, the Basic Courses would constitute the beginning of their senior high school program. From the discussion above, it should be evident that the Basic Courses as envisioned within the new syllabus, are *not* to be confused with the so-called "exploratory" courses offered in some schools to help students decide which of several languages to study.

By the end of the Basic Course, students will need assistance in making a number of decisions. One such decision is which of the two strands leading out of the Basic Courses would be most suitable for them. For those who have demonstrated marginal aptitude in all four skill areas and who would benefit from a slower pace of instruction, the Local Credit strand might be most appropriate. Within this strand, schools would determine which of a number of course options, in terms of skill and/or topical emphasis, they need to offer to meet the needs of these students. Constant expert assessment of students' progress would enhance their chances of moving laterally into the more demanding State Diploma Credit strand.

The State Diploma Credit Strand

Whereas the Local Credit strand will consist of sets of short-term courses designed to take students as far as they are able and willing to go in a foreign language of their choice, the State Diploma Credit strand will be more sequential in nature, leading to development of specific skills in greater depth. As illustrated in Figure 1, four distinct sequence options will be possible within this strand:

The Four-Skill Sequence – For students who have demonstrated competence and interest in developing all four language skills in the Basic Course.

The Oral Communication Sequence – For students who have demonstrated aptitude and interest in developing the listening and speaking skills to a greater extent than the other two skills. The goal of this sequence will be to develop the listening and speaking skills in greater depth than in the four-skill sequence. The other two skills (reading and writing) will serve a supportive function only.

The Reading Sequence – For students who have demonstrated particular aptitude in reading and are primarily interested in developing this skill in greater depth than would be possible in pursuing a four-skill sequence. The other three language skills will serve supportive functions only.

The Reading-Writing Sequence – For students who have a particular interest in developing these skills and have demonstrated sufficient aptitude in the Basic Course to do so successfully.

The syllabus will recommend cultural themes around which each of the four sequences should be developed.

Local Implementation

The number of languages, as well as the number of options within each strand a given school can and

should offer, will depend essentially on the size of the school population and on the degree of heterogeneity of its students' aptitudes and interests. The syllabus will describe the program possibilities; the schools must decide which of these will best serve the needs of their students. It must be noted, however, that recent trends in the change of classroom management strategies will make it feasible even for schools with relatively small enrollments to consider offering at least two options in a particular language without necessitating additional staff or conflicts in scheduling. Students in the Spanish reading sequence, for example, could be working independently or in small groups on developing that skill at the same time and in the same classroom as students in the Spanish oral communication sequence are engaging in conversational activities with the teacher. Conversely, one group of students might be involved in listening-comprehension practice through the use of electronic equipment at the same time that another group, in another section of the same classroom, discusses reading activities with the teacher.

Application to Career Education

By virtue of its flexibility in affording students choices in developing skills according to their aptitudes and interests, the new modern foreign language curriculum will be ideally suited for the infusion of career education concepts and skills in the foreign language program. From the outset, it will contribute to students' self-awareness by assigning to them part of the responsibility for assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Accentuation of their strengths will help them develop a positive image of themselves. The importance of decision-making is a clearly defined aspect of the process. Beyond the infusion of awareness and other components of career-oriented education, the new program will make a significant contribution to the actual preparation phase as well. It has been pointed out elsewhere[1] that different careers demand different levels of competence in different skill areas. Future stenographers, for example, may be expected to need a higher degree of proficiency in listening and writing than future engineers, whose work would possibly indicate a greater application of the reading skill. Future social workers, on the other hand, might have to be highly competent in the oral communication (listening and speaking) skills, and so on. The new syllabus will provide students with the options necessary to meet these diversified needs.

Conclusion

Nearly two decades ago, New York State led the way to change with its modern foreign language curriculum. It is once again accepting the challenge of putting into action that which has become the subject of much recent discussion.

Foreign language teachers in New York State and elsewhere have already made considerable progress in the individualization of the *instructional* process. For example, teachers' modified strategies have enabled many students to progress at a pace commensurate with their aptitude in our subject area. In addition, some teachers have been attempting successfully to provide greater latitude in accommodating students' modalities and styles of learning. It would seem, therefore, that this change of teachers' attitude toward students will now make it possible, if not imperative, to consider the diversification of *objectives and content* as well. No one is more keenly aware of the critical urgency of the need than foreign language teachers. Wilga Rivers recently echoed the sentiments of the Bureau of Foreign Languages Education and the Curriculum Advisory Committee when she stated, "Our students abandon language study because they do not know the choices available to them or because we do not allow them to choose."[2] Chapter III of the new syllabus will discuss what the choices might be; Chapter II will describe ways in which students and others may be made aware of these choices.

The thrust of the new curriculum is expected to require a continuous effort by everyone concerned with its implementation to further rethink and modify existing attitudes and practices. Philosophically, teachers must be ready and willing to encourage and work with a much wider range of students in second language learning than in the past. Guidance staff, likewise, should nurture practices that would eliminate the identification of students categorically as "language" or "non-language" candidates. In fact, there will be a greater need than ever before for a close cooperation between counselors and classroom teachers for this and other reasons. It is self-evident, for example, that both will need to work together in advising students of the curricular choices available to them and in guiding them into the most appropriate program option. The assessment of students' strengths and weaknesses in particular language skill areas, especially in the Basic Courses, will necessitate the improvement of evaluative techniques and of reporting the results. The development of

language skills and cultural insights will no longer be viewed as separate tasks. Instead, culturally significant themes will serve as the basic content for developing the language skills. Since it is unlikely that any one text available today will suffice to accomplish this goal adequately in all of the skill areas, teachers' resourcefulness and ingenuity in the selection of materials from a variety of sources will be an extremely important factor in the success of the program. Chapter V of the new syllabus will deal with this aspect.

We anticipate that the field testing of the new curriculum will begin in selected schools in September 1977 for a period of three to four years. In the meantime, the above considerations regarding the dimensions and conditions as they will affect foreign language teachers may well be discussed in in-service workshops and pre-service training programs. To be sure, the transition from a narrowly defined curriculum, aimed primarily at those who could fit the mold, to a student-centered curriculum will be accomplished only with patience, hard work, and sacrifice. But, then, we are well advised that "it is a matter of attitude on our part: we must work with our students in establishing what they are really seeking in learning the language, rather than imposing on them our view of their needs. This may add further organizational complications, but we cannot speak sincerely of 'individualization' without it."[3]

[1]Paul E. Dammer, "The Role of Foreign Language Teachers in Career Education," *Language Association Bulletin*, XXVII, No. 1 (September 1975), 11-13.

[2]Wilga M. Rivers, "Individualized Instruction and Cooperative Learning," *AATF National Bulletin*, I, No. 3 (April 1976), 1.

[3]*Ibid.*

TABLE 1: Foreign Language Enrollments in the Public Secondary Schools of New York State, 1974-75*

	FRENCH	GERMAN	HEBREW	ITALIAN	RUSSIAN	SPANISH	LATIN	TOTAL
Grade 7	26,510	3,557	329	3,706	387	48,347	1,177	84,013
Grade 8	26,878	3,778	?	4,197	162	47,092	1,216	83,323
Total, 7-8	53,388	7,335	329	7,903	549	95,439	2,393	167,336
Grades 9-12	114,488	24,529	2,181	18,983	1,951	223,359	11,846	397,337
Total, 7-12	167,876	31,864	2,510	26,886	2,500	318,798	14,239	564,673

TABLE 2: Percent of Public Secondary School Population in New York State Engaged in Foreign Language Study, 1974-75*

	FRENCH	GERMAN	HEBREW	ITALIAN	RUSSIAN	SPANISH	LATIN	TOTAL
Grade 7	9.9%	1.3%	1%	1.4%	1%	18.0%	4%	31.2%
Grade 8	10.2%	1.4%	?	1.6%	1%	18.0%	5%	31.8%
Grades 9-12	10.6%	2.3%	2%	1.8%	2%	20.0%	1.1%	36.3%

**Based on Data Provided by the New York State Education Department's Information Center on Education.*